

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

October 4, 2005

The Honorable Joe Barton
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John D. Dingell
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2322 Rayburn Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Barton and Ranking Member Dingell:

We are encouraged that the Energy and Commerce Committee will soon consider legislation to modernize the Communications Act, and we agree that advances in technology require a fresh look at our nation's telecommunications policies. As New Democrats, we believe policy should reflect the new reality of a world with an information and technology-driven global economy. We believe that telecommunication reform legislation is one of the most important steps the 109th Congress can take to promote U.S. technological innovation and leadership.

When Congress last passed major telecommunications reform in 1996, the Internet was in its infancy and only one in four Americans had a cell phone. Less than a decade later, the way we communicate and get information and entertainment – in our homes, businesses and vehicles – has completely changed. Consumers have vastly more information and more access to new technologies, products, and choices. We need a federal telecommunications policy that removes outdated regulations in order to reflect this new competitive reality.

The Telecommunications Act of 1996, which minimally addressed the changes the Internet would bring, assumed a world that soon ceased to exist. Future reform must be flexible enough to encompass global changes to the systems we use for communications, information and entertainment. Technology that today is in its infancy could be the wave of the future or could end up as a footnote in telecommunications history. We need technology-neutral and future-proof communications laws and policies.

We also need to ensure that universal service is protected so all Americans can have access to quality advanced telecommunications services that are comparable in price and scope. Our nation as a whole is a beneficiary of our past commitments to universal service, and it is imperative that this is protected in any reform efforts.

Finally, we need to ensure that adequate spectrum is freed up through the transition to digital television. This is an essential part of ensuring that our public safety personnel and first responders can improve their communications capabilities. This is also an

important first step in addressing the problem of broadband access in underserved communities. The wireless broadband technology that can be deployed using the spectrum vacated in the DTV transition also provides the opportunity to bring a new competitive infrastructure throughout the telecom industry, with potential for new and innovative products and services and increased competition. As we seek to compete in the global technology market place, this type of opportunity could provide multiple benefits to the nation.

In order to enhance America's competitiveness in the global marketplace, create jobs, and maintain our nation's leadership in developing new technologies, we believe that telecommunications reform must promote competition while preserving consumer safeguards and universal service to ensure that all Americans – rural and urban, rich and poor – benefit from competition and innovation.

In principle, telecommunications reform should:

- **Promote increased private investment in both wireline and wireless communications networks and services.**
- **Maximize the value and availability of the radio spectrum to spur new products and innovation and to provide additional capacity for public safety and first responders.**
- **Allow for healthy competition by removing artificial or outdated restraints on the marketplace.**
- **Protect the commitment to universal service for quality advanced telecommunications services.**
- **Promote the expansion of a full range of services, including broadband, into currently underserved areas, relying on competitive markets to the greatest extent possible.**
- **Maintain consumer protections in cases of market failure.**
- **Create American jobs and economic growth.**
- **Give all consumers the greatest possible choice of legal content, products, and services available.**

We know that your Committee has a very difficult task ahead, but we appreciate your consideration of the above principles.

Sincerely,



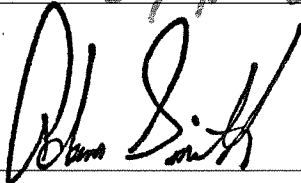
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